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Chado: The Japanese Way of Tea

The title of my paper is "Chado: The Japanese Way of Tea", and I would like to outline the world of the Way of Tea, analyse its history, connection to Japanese culture, and also touch Japanese philosophical aspects.

I will then show that through the practice of the Japanese Tea Ceremony, chado, genuine harmony and peace can be achieved; in other words, and this is very much in line with the role that the Japan Studies Association of Canada plays: to foster awareness of Japan and to promote peaceful and multilateral international relations.

I just used the term "Tea Ceremony" because this is how chado is mostly known in the West, but this implies that it is something like a show or an entertainment, and this would not hit the point. Therefore, I feel, the Way of Tea is the appropriate translation for chado; cha meaning of course tea, and do meaning way, so: "Way of Tea". Sometimes instead of chado, the term chanoyu is used, which literally means "hot water for tea".

An internet book search will reveal that there are not so many books

published about the Way of Tea which actually instruct any tea procedures past the beginner's level. This is because chado does not rely on written-down words, but on oral instruction directly from teacher to student, or as my late teacher would always say, "Tea cannot be learned from a book, only from the heart." This way of instruction is found in the Japanese teaching philosophy: ishin-denshin (transmitting from my heart/mind to your heart/mind) — meaning that the ultimate reality or ultimate wisdom or ultimate insight, or however you label it, cannot be learned through books or scriptures, but can only be induced by a teacher to a student directly, and then experienced by the student directly with his own heart and mind and body.

Arguing in this direction, Sen Rikyu's grandson, the Grand Tea Master, Sotan wrote in the 16th century:

Chanoyu to wa	Chanoyu
Kokoron ni tsutae	is conveyed through the mind,
Me ni tsutae	through eye
Mimi ni tsutaete	and ear—
Hitofude mo nashi	without a single stroke of the brush.

Recalling my own tea learning: the training and instructions on the Way of Tea are very long, requiring much discipline, much physical labour (samu), only to realize the "becoming one" with the Way of Tea. For example, practitioners must clean the gardens and wipe each and every leaf clean before a tea gathering, so that the kimono of the guest might not become dirty when accidentally slightly striking against a leaf while walking through the garden path to the assembly rooms. But, in my experience, this strict training also cultivates humility, gratitude and develops a calm character based on the principles of harmony, respect, and kindness.

Let me give you an example of "becoming one with tea" from my own personal experience:

When I went to a tea gathering some days ago, I was to prepare tea for many guests. This procedure is simple and one of the first that students of the Way of Tea learn, so it is not so difficult. There were a lot of guests present, and I had to improvise many things. So, I realized that the development of a

student of the Way of Tea really proceeds through three stages: Shu, first a student learns the procedures by heart, ha, he is no longer hindered by these, and ri, he breaks free and develops his own forms and patterns. Rikyu's poem was found true: "Practice involves beginning to learn from one (the very first procedure) and coming to know ten (mastering the highest level procedures), then returning from ten to the original one". This had just happened to me that day.

When I then heard at this exact moment some birds crying in the evening sky, I experienced a bliss that could be labeled as "becoming one with tea". "Wild geese of the skies... their cries are forlorn. Passing into the drifting rains, the chill of autumn.": I felt completely one with the "Way of Tea", the procedure, the utensils and equipment, myself and the guests, I became very still, collected, happy and peaceful. I was very collected and felt very much "here-and-now", while I was preparing and improvising the tea, and I was completely concentrated on my "free" doing tea, my "releasing" myself, beyond any prescribed rules. In other words, I felt completely "one" and was no longer attached to any concept of "rules", "equipment", and "guests": I thus became non-aware of them anymore; being completely and peacefully settled in my no longer discriminating activities here-and-now – and even transcending these; in other words, I was released, while being absolutely aware and fully acting – at least during this period of tea preparation.



Studying Tea

I just said that there are not so many books about the Way of Tea, and really even nowadays, - at least with my teacher - it is still forbidden for the student to write down any notes during the lessons past the beginner's level. Imagine her reaction when I asked her to video-tape our lessons...! I was told that until around fifty years ago, students were not allowed to talk during the lessons and were even forbidden to ask questions to the teacher: students were to watch the teacher closely and to remember all his movements, so that one day they will create their own pattern and form and bring out their own "spirit" of the Way of Tea; Gengensai, the eleventh Urasenke Grand Master, wrote in his Rules of Practice in 1856 the following orders:

There will be strict adherence to decorum, and unnecessary talking will not be allowed . . . Questions are forbidden during the preparation of tea . . . Old and young alike should undertake practice with no sense of shame.



At a formal tea gathering (chaji), the host will prepare and serve two kinds of tea: thick tea (koicha, let's say like espresso) and thin tea (usucha, like regular coffee), with some sweets served before and in between them; the procedure of which is called temae. The two kinds of tea vary in the utensils, the tea bowls, the amount of powdered tea used, and also in the manner of partaking them.

Students first learn thin tea before they embark on thick tea. Altogether, there are eighty-five different types of temae known in the Urasenke school

of tea—each perfected in fixed rules, which bring out the most beautiful forms possible in using the different utensils, preparing tea by using these utensils, and partaking it. Some movements are slow, some fast, some appear light, some appear heavy, some are abrupt, and some are delicate; the positions of the utensils, and the sequence of actions, are absolutely defined.

The beauty of the moment is manifested in the host being completely absorbed in this very moment in this very action; this is the perfected spirit of Zen Buddhism. A tea preparation, *temae*, cannot be measured in how good the student can remember the different steps of preparing and serving, but in how much he himself has become the spirit of “drawing hot water from the kettle,” “whisking green tea,” and so on; this is very graceful and brings out the beauty of the moment. Thus, the preparation and serving of a bowl of tea will manifest the same spirit as in all actions of the daily life. The phrase *ichigo-ichie*, meaning “one time—one meeting,” or, as the Past Grand Master Sen Genshitsu (the father of the present Grand Master) likes to translate it, “one-time-one-chance” or “one-time-one opportunity”, is fully established in the spirit of a tea meeting. *Ichigo-ichie*, the coming together of the host and the guests, is only certain here and now; yesterday is gone, and nobody knows for sure if one will ever meet again in the future. Because of *ichigo-ichie*, the host and the guests must make the most of the moment and put their fullest attention, effort, heart, and thankfulness into the actual tea gathering as if it were the last one in their life. The Past Grand Master Sen Genshitsu experienced that when he prepared *chado*-Tea for his comrades and himself before they were to fly off as kamikaze-pilots, never to return home. Well, they all died, only he and one friend were spared, as they couldn’t depart on that day because of heavy fog obstructing visibility, so they were scheduled to fly off again – the day after the Second World War ended for Japan – lucky them!



History of the Way of Tea

Now I would like to talk very briefly about the history of the Japanese Way of Tea.

There are many somehow religiously shaped drinks: Christianity has wine, Islam has coffee, and Japanese Buddhism has powdered and whisked green tea. Regarding tea, the culture of black tea originated in India and spread to the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, whereas the green tea originated in China and spread from there to Japan. Using more or less similar tea plants, the only main difference is that for black tea, the tea leaves are fermented; whereas for green tea, the leaves are steamed.

In the 12th century, the monk Eisai, the founder of the Japanese Rinzai School of Zen Buddhism, returned from China and brought back with him tea seeds and, convinced of the benefits of tea drinking, strongly propagated tea drinking in Japan. One of his books, *Preservation of Health through Drinking Tea* (Japanese: *Kissa Yojoki*), explains the medical virtues of tea and starts with this line: "Tea is an elixir for good health, a miraculous means of prolonging one's life". He also administered green powdered tea to the powerful shogun Minamoto for relief of his frequent hangovers. Eisai Zenji had the head abbot of the Kozan-ji in Kyoto plant his tea seeds, and this is the exact beginning of tea growing in Japan. Soon, the Buddhist temples started to introduce rules for tea preparation, called *sarei*. These were ritual celebration teas, usually offered at the first morning meeting of the temple. This habit still exists today; and for example at our monastery, it is offered every morning between 7:20 and 8:00, where everybody in the monastery gathers together (which is, as a side note, an excellent method for checking the whereabouts of all the monks) – let's not forget that we get up at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning!

In the 13th century, Dogen Zenji from the Japanese Soto Zen brought back from Sung China a ceramic caddy for tea powder, called *koga kata-tsuki*, which became the model for tea caddies used for thick green tea even until now—more than 750 years after Dogen.



In the 14th century, the head priest of the Rinzai-Daitoku-ji head temple in Kyoto, the famous Ikkyu Zenji, loved tea and coined the phrases "The Buddha's law also exists in Tea" and "Tea originated out of Zen".

An amusing anecdote that illustrates Ikkyu's sharp-witted character goes as follows: "Accidentally, as a young, he broke a favorite tea bowl of his master, and when the master returned, he asked him, 'Why do people have to die?' The master answered that everything is impermanent and has to die, and that death is a natural process. Ikkyu laid the pieces of the bowl before the master and said, 'It was time for your bowl to die'".

In the 15th century, the Zen Buddhist monk and tea-obsessed Shuko (also sometimes pronounced Juko) Murata said remarks like "I do not like the moon in a cloudless sky", referring to the sensible aesthetic beauty of the "imperfect" moon shining through rents in the clouds rather than the "perfect" moon shining brightly in the cloudless sky. This preference for the "imperfect" and "incomplete" led him to develop the first four-and-a-half-tatami-mat room explicitly for tea (the standard size of a tearoom even nowadays—around 2.7 by 2.7 meters—to include one host and all the guests!). When asked why he had developed such a small tearoom, he answered that in a tearoom, "any discrimination between oneself and the others vanishes, the virtue of gentleness prevails, and a new mutual understanding can be found". He coined terms like modesty, harmony, respect, and cleanliness—similar to wa (harmony), kei (respect), sei (purity), and jaku (tranquility). Through his concept of hiesabi, "chill and aged," he created a quiet form of tea that is rich in calmness and insight, and this was named the soan-style of tea.



The exceptionally tea skilled and uncompromising Sen Rikyu (1521–1591) was the most active, most powerful, most controversial, and most extraordinary tea person ever, who developed, completed, perfected, and codified the rules of the Way of Tea and its etiquette of preparing and receiving a bowl of tea, as still practiced today. It is fair to say that only because of Sen Rikyu we have the practice of chado as it is today. He is regarded as the First Grand Master of the Japanese Way of Tea line of Grand Tea Masters, who are now in the 16th generation.

Sen Rikyu was born into a wealthy merchant family dealing in fish. When he practiced Zen in his twenties, he received the Buddhist name Soeki. He was thus known as Sen Soeki. The first syllable of his first name, So, is still found in all tea names descending from his tradition, such as Soshitsu of the present grand master and Sofu of, well, myself.

It would go beyond the scope of this paper to present a complete analysis of Rikyu's life and death by seppuku, ordered by the ruler of Japan, Hideyoshi. It should only be mentioned here that he brought the wabi sabi tea to its uncompromising height and established the Way of Tea as a path.

Finally, it should be noted that chado was exclusively for men until recently. The Sino-Japanese War in the 19th century saw the unfortunate death of many men, and the thirteenth grand master of Urasenke, Ennosai, taught the remaining women and widows all the way up to tea instructor licensing and introduced the Way of Tea in the curricula of secondary girls' schools throughout Japan. This was a completion of the initial steps taken by the

wife of his father, the twelfth grand master, Yumyosai, who saw a decline in Japanese culture and tradition. Chado in schools was further developed by the fourteenth grand master, Tantansai; and the fifteenth grand master, Hounsai, the father of the present Grand Master, who established chado at credit-level courses in universities and colleges and was the first to actively expand the Way of Tea abroad.



The Philosophy of the Way of Tea

Now I would like to talk about the philosophy of the Way of Tea. It is based on these principles: wa, kei, sei, jaku, wabi sabi, and suki. I'll explain these one-by-one.

Wa (harmony) is a feeling of oneness with nature and people—a harmonious spirit between host and guest, guest and guest, but also between the seasons, weather, and utensils chosen for this particular event: for example, light equipment that evokes a feeling of coolness in summer or heavy, earthen ware that gives the feeling of warmth in winter. Like everything that is bound to change, weather is unpredictable, and one should always be prepared for rain even on a sunny day. Man is not separable from nature, and nature not separable from man.

Kei (respect) arises out of a feeling for gratitude, goodwill, friendship, and

includes respect for the worthiness of other people, acceptance of their individuality, respect for both cheap as well as expensive utensils, and indeed for everything in our daily life. In the Way of Tea, kei is manifested in the hospitality and mutual concern of the host and the guests, and the quiet and careful handling of the utensils and equipment. What we, in the West, would call democracy is also reflected in kei, since participants respect and value their worthiness as individuals: for example, Rikyu's crawling entrance (nijiriguchi) made everybody equal—the king, the nobleman, the samurai, the merchant, the farmer—through the same degree of bowing and crawling when entering the tearoom.



Sei (purity) includes cleanliness and orderliness, both physically and spiritually. It plays a very important role, and the guests of a tea gathering first wash their hands and rinse their mouth before entering the tea hut, which symbolizes the cleaning of their heart and mind as well as of their body; the host, when purifying the tea utensils with a silk cloth, also cleans his spirit at the same time. After the tea meeting, having sat in reflective silence for a while, the host will put all utensils back to their original places and clean the tearoom because a clean heart manifests naturally a clean and orderly room.

Jaku (tranquility) refers to the Japanese term nehan (Sanskrit: nirvana). This is a state of mind – at least this is how I, well, “see” it - of oneness with tea, stillness, happiness, and transcendence (of mind-body, object-subject, host-utensil, guest-host, etc.). Constantly practicing wa, kei, and sei realizes

jaku.



Wabi-sabi...I will try to explain it with a poem by the person of the way of tea, S?gi, from the 15th century:

Amatsu kari	Wild geese of the skies;
Yono taka mine ni	on the high peak at night
Kœ wabite	their cries are forlorn.
Shigure ni utsuru	Passing into the drifting rains,
Aki no samukesa	the chill of autumn.

Wabi sabi is not really appropriately translatable into English, but the term “imperfect beauty” might come near. Better than any direct translation that might lose some of the deep meaning of wabi sabi, Tea Master Sotaku wrote in his work Zen-cha Roku:

Always bear in mind that wabi involves not regarding incapacities as incapacitating, not feeling that lacking something is deprivation, nor thinking that what is not provided is deficiency. To regard incapacity as incapacitating, to feel that lack is deprivation, or to believe that not being provided for is poverty is not wabi . . . Pine pillars, bamboo joists, left as they are, curved and straight, square and round, up and down, left and right, new and old, light and heavy, long and short, broad and narrow, repaired where chipped,

patched where torn. Everything at odds, nothing matching.

One is reminded of Shuko's remark as quoted above: "I do not like the moon in a cloudless sky"—which means that imperfect, irregular beauty is preferred to perfection; the moon behind some clouds is more beautiful than the perfectly shining full moon in a bright sky.

Wabi sabi incorporates the ideals of finding spiritual freedom in a situation of material insufficiency, not to be bound to material things, expectation, or worldly values, but to transcend them; a broken but repaired piece is completely acceptable at a tea meeting, and insufficient equipment can still be used sufficiently by a calm and improvising heart. Wabi sabi is the realm of true sincerity. In short, the ideals of being and acting simple and unpretentious, the beauty of a lotus flower blooming above mud, purity and perfection, and detachment are included in the meaning of wabi sabi.

Suki is also a term whose meaning is difficult to grasp—and even more difficult to translate! In Rikyu's times, it was used as a synonym for the Way of Tea; suki-cha or suki-tea was the phrase of the day. Suki means, in its literal translation in English, "to like" or "to love"; and Rikyu has used this term to illustrate that without suki, combined with purity of heart and mind, there is no "life," only abstraction, in the practice of the Way of Tea. Tea without suki is just a form, an empty vessel, some robotlike rules. I therefore propose to translate the term suki into English as "egoless, unconditioned loving-kindness."

To reflect upon, and prepare for, the guests' well-being, serve them as good one can - in the Way of Tea, this means that the host must try to understand the guests' characters and needs when he is preparing for the tea gathering, and the guest must try to understand the host's character and spirit; by respecting and thoughtfully serving each other, together, they will produce true human relationships. In the realm of wabi sabi and suki, "to be of service to one another" induces true "happiness."

In other words, the Way of Tea sees the development of harmony and world peace as, first of all, being established and developed within oneself through continuous devoted practice. From there, it will spread over to fellow beings

and all over the world, ideally. Likewise, it does not try to change a nation, ideology, or system per se, but starts with the individual.



Conclusion

Wabi sabi (imperfect beauty) includes acting unpretentious and possessing a simple but calm mind that does not regard incapacity as lacking something, but that transcends material things and worldly values; a mind that is not irritated when something unexpected happens, or when something is insufficient.

The Japanese term suki (egoless, unconditioned loving-kindness) is related to the ideal of service above self, for example, feeling happy for the success of others, engaging in voluntary and humanitarian service, implementing suki in one's daily life in one's family, community, and even business—such friendliness and egoless, unconditioned loving-kindness as developed through the practice of suki are the basic ingredients for harmony and world peace, unconditionally accepting race, colour, religion, etc.

Sei (purity) includes physical and spiritual cleanliness and orderliness.

Wa (harmony) is a feeling of harmonious oneness with an individual and with people and nature. Respect for nature follows naturally out of the wa and sei attitude, and this includes gratefulness for, appreciative use of, and caring for, the gifts of nature such as air, water, and plants. Purity and harmony is realized through generosity, hospitality, and compassion; whereas “pollution” and disharmony are produced by greed and hatred; unpure and disharmonious morality leads to deterioration of man and

nature, whereas purity and harmony lead to improvement of the quality of man and nature; this could result in us living peacefully in this world without harming it and ourselves, thus supporting the development of harmony and world peace.